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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 QUITO 002898

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: ELECTION: CORREA WINS BIG, NOBOA FIZZLES

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Leftist candidate Rafael Correa (representing the Proud and Sovereign Fatherland Movement-PAIS and Socialist Party) won the runoff round of presidential voting decisively over rival candidate Alvaro Noboa (PRIAN) on November 26, according to most exit polls and quick count results. The most credible quick count put the difference at 13 percent. One polling firm associated with Noboa reported a Noboa victory; Noboa questioned poll results and called on his supporters to wait for official results (expected by November 28 at the earliest). Voting proceeded normally on election day, with few unusual incidents reported. Correa declared victory in a post-electoral press conference, and cited vote results as evidence of support for his proposed constituent assembly to profoundly reform the state, including Congress. He reaffirmed cabinet selections announced before the first round of voting on October 15, but did not announce any new names. We recommend the Department congratulate Correa on his apparent victory on November 27; the Ambassador will call Correa after that statement is issued. We recommend postponing any presidential congratulatory call until after results are official. End Summary.

Preliminary Results

¶2. (U) Exit polls:	Correa	Noboa
--CEDATOS:	56.8	43.2
--Market:	57.9	42
--RTS/Teleamazonas:	57	43
--Consultar (Noboa-funded):	36	42

¶3. (SBU) Quick counts:		
--RTS/Teleamazonas:	56.35	43.65
(with 95.6% of sample)		
--Citizen Participation:	56.40	43.60
(with 94.4% of sample)		

¶4. (U) Official Count: No results reported from electoral authorities (TSE) as of 10:00 pm on November 26. Official results are due within 10 days. First round results took over a week, but TSE officials hope to announce final results by November 28 or 29.

¶5. (U) According to CEDATOS' exit poll/USAID-supported NGO Citizen Participation's quick count, further breakdown of results is as follows:

	Correa	Noboa
Coast (49.8% of population)	43.8/44.3	56.2/55.7
Highlands (44.9%)	70.8/68.7	29.2/31.3
Amazon (4.5%)	62.5/n/a	37.5/n/a
Rural:	n/a/61.1	n/a/38.9
Urban:	n/a/55.1	n/a/44.9

Null votes (Cedatos): 5.0%; Blank votes (Cedatos): 1.5%

Voting Goes Smoothly

¶6. (U) Few incidents marred voting on November 26. As usual, some voting booths were delayed in opening, due to the tardiness of some volunteer election officials. Voting was suspended in the canton of Portete, in Azuay province, where protesters had blocked an access road with burning tires. An individual posing as an election official in a Quito voting station was identified by PAIS supporters and arrested; another individual reportedly fled the scene. Also normal were sporadic reports of multiple arrests for proselytizing within voting stations, and more numerous arrests for imbibing or selling alcohol during the election period (violators are normally released after the dry period ends at noon the day after elections).

¶7. (SBU) Embassy observers and media reported relatively low turnout by voters in several areas (Cuenca, Azuay; Quininde, Esmeraldas; Guayaquil) as of early afternoon. Hot temperatures in Guayaquil may have affected turnout there.

¶8. (SBU) OAS election observation mission (EOM) Chief Rafael Bielsa abruptly left Ecuador on November 25, after arriving

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in Guayaquil on November 24. An OAS statement claimed that Bielsa had been called back to Washington to report on election developments. Press here speculated about the motives for Bielsa's departure. The OAS will issue a statement about the electoral process on November 27. OAS EOM Deputy Benamor (please protect) told us the OAS quick count, using a small sample which will not be publicly released, showed a 58/42 Correa victory. Results reported by the Embassy's 19 volunteers observing as part of the EOM correspond to the general trends reported by polling firms.

Reaction

¶9. (U) Noboa immediately questioned the credibility of exit poll results, pending official results from the TSE. He made no claims of electoral fraud, but called on his party's newly-elected congressional delegation to observe the official count process in the provinces.

¶10. (U) An hour after the polls closed, Correa held a press conference in which he declared victory ("David has slain Goliath"), thanking his supporters, calling for national unity and cooperation with Ecuadorians "with clean hands" and pledging to "end the long sad night of neo-liberal policies." Responding to questions, Correa repeated his general campaign themes, including his opposition to an FTA with the U.S. He expressed hopes for good relations with neighboring Colombia, pledged to maintain dollarization, renegotiate foreign debt, explore the possibility of re-joining OPEC, and reaffirmed his earlier partial list of cabinet choices drawn from key inner circle campaign advisors.

¶11. (U) Interviewed after quick count results were announced, ex-president Lucio Gutierrez suggested that Congress should be allowed time (up to six months) to act on constitutional reforms. If Congress blocked needed political reform, his party would join in support of convoking a constituent assembly.

Comment and Recommendation

¶12. (SBU) Early results indicate a decisive win, reducing the likelihood of post-electoral conflict. We do not expect final results to differ much from Citizen Participation's quick count, the most credible of all the polling organizations in our view. The single anomalous result came from the polling firm Consultar, which is in the direct employ of Noboa and is not a credible source. If official results confirm this early result, we would not expect significant challenges or demonstrations from the Noboa camp.

¶13. (SBU) With results unlikely to change, we recommend the Department issue or make a statement on November 27 congratulating Correa as the apparent victor, along the lines of what was issued after the Morales victory in Bolivia. We would gain points from many observers here for graciousness in the face of what is widely assumed to be an undesired result. Delaying such a statement would make us appear grudging, and risks starting us off badly with the incoming government to no benefit. The Ambassador proposes to follow-up the Department's statement with a congratulatory call to Correa on November 27. We recommend that a presidential call be scheduled after results are official (currently forecast for November 28 or 29.) Looking ahead, we will seek to hold Correa to the more moderate rhetoric of recent weeks. With very limited support from the new congress, no alliances in place with major mayors or provincial leaders and a wary business class, he faces far from smooth sailing in his ability to pursue a radical agenda.

¶14. (U) Suggested Press Statement

The United States congratulates the People of Ecuador for exercising their democratic rights at the polls and for conducting peaceful elections.

While we are still awaiting the official results from Ecuador's Supreme Electoral Tribunal, preliminary results

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point to a victory by Rafael Correa during the November 26 second-round presidential election.

We offer our congratulations to Mr. Correa on his apparent victory.

As we have said during previous conversations with Mr. Correa, the United States will continue to build on its successful cooperation with Ecuador, consistent with our commitment to its democratic institutions and the prosperity of its people.

JEWELL